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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001762

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DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, S/CT; NSC FOR E. MILLARD

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10-10-13

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SUBJECT: Tamil MPs candidly discuss peace process issues with Ambassador

Refs: Colombo 1708, and previous

(U) Classified by Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead.
Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: The Ambassador met October 9 with key MPs from the Tamil National Alliance (TNA). Asked for their views on the peace process, the MPs said the inability of internally displaced persons to return to their lands was causing great discontent. The MPs said progress toward peace would require a cooperative relationship between the President and Prime Minister. They said the LTTE may not have understood the U.S. public message at the time of FTO redesignation. While the MPs expressed reservations about some peace process issues, they appeared relatively upbeat. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) MEETING WITH TAMIL MPS: On October 9, Ambassador Lunstead met with three key MPs from the Tamil National Alliance (TNA): Gajan Ponnambalam, N. Raviraj, and R. Sampathan. Suresh Premachandran, the leader of a faction of the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), and a member of the TNA, also attended, although Premachandran is not a current MP. Poloff and pol FSN also attended the meeting.

13. (C) VIEWS ON THE PEACE PROCESS: Asked for their views on the status of the peace process, the MPs expressed concern over the continuing inability of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to return to their lands in the Sri Lanka military's "High Security Zones" and surrounding areas in the north and east. Sampathan and Ponnambalam stressed the importance of this issue to the Tamil population, and said that in response to tremendous pressure on the issue from the TNA's constituency, the TNA was considering possible campaigns of civil disobedience.

14. (C) Turning to interim administration of the north/east, the MPs noted that the biggest task of any interim setup would be to create conditions of normalcy for people living in those areas. Raviraj commented that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) could use their role in an interim administration in a positive way as a "stepping stone" to the political mainstream. Sampathan underscored the need for interim administration of aid in the north/east, adding that peace dividends were not reaching Tamil people in line with their expectations. Sampathan further opined that the LTTE's counterproposals would likely include requests for increased powers in the areas of police, land management, and finance in the area of aid administration. Sampathan and Ponnambalam said that they were convinced the LTTE was serious about seeking peace, but that the LTTE cadres were much more skeptical.

15. (C) COMMENTS ON COHABITATION: Regarding cohabitation tensions, Sampathan commented that the lack of a consensus in the Sinhalese political parties -- as exemplified by the tense relationship between the President and Prime Minister -- was a serious problem for the peace process, and would likely make the LTTE question whether the GSL could bring about reforms necessary for the peace process. In particular, the PM and the President would have to agree to any interim administration deal. Sampathan said the TNA was reluctant to deal directly with the President, as they did not want the PM to think they were dealing behind his back. Ambassador noted that the President and PM were both personally dedicated to peace, and that this might help them to make a deal.

16. (C) DID THE TIGERS GET THE MESSAGE?: When asked if the LTTE had fully understood that, despite their recent U.S. Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) redesignation, the group could be removed from the list if it changed its behavior, Sampathan said he understood the U.S. message, but he feared the Tigers did not. Ponnambalam said that he also believed the LTTE did not fully understand the message the U.S. was sending, adding that if the U.S. were to remove the ban, he believed the LTTE

would be more flexible in the peace process. On October 9, the pro-LTTE website "TamilNet" carried an article on the MPs' meeting with the Ambassador. The article quoted the MPs as saying the redesignation was "sad to note" at a time when the LTTE had "committed itself to finding a political solution to the conflict."

17. (C) COMMENT: TNA members are loath to criticize the LTTE, and their suggestion that the U.S. rescind the FTO designation comes as no surprise -- and not one we need to pay much attention to. We were struck, however, by their contention that our intended message to the LTTE may not be getting through. See Septel on USAID meeting with LTTE officials in Trincomalee in which the comments of LTTE officials suggest they got the redesignation message perfectly. Their anguish about the lack of resettlement of IDPs seemed quite genuine. Their comment about a possible civil disobedience campaign is disturbing. The picture of the Sri Lankan military facing down peaceful Tamil protesters would certainly not advance the peace process. END COMMENT.

18. (U) Minimize considered.

LUNSTEAD